

“Save Bees and Farmers! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment”

European Citizens’ Initiative

Press release



Huge Europe-wide campaign launches to ban pesticides, transform agriculture and save bees, farmers and nature alike

A European Citizens’ Initiative launches today to phase out synthetic pesticides by 2035, support farmers, and save bees and nature. If it gathers one million signatures by September 2020, the EU Commission and Parliament must consider turning the campaign’s demands into law. [1]

90 organisations from 17 EU countries are jointly launching the campaign, with the support of organic farming associations.

International scientists have called for an urgent "transformative change" to stop the collapse of nature. A quarter of Europe's wild animals are severely threatened, half of our nature sites are in an unfavourable condition, and ecosystem services are deteriorating. [2]

Meanwhile, millions of farmers are being squeezed out by unfair prices, the lack of political support and big corporations. Four million small farms disappeared between 2005 and 2016 in the EU. [3]

The ECI calls on the European Commission to introduce legal proposals to:

1. Phase out synthetic pesticides by 2035: Phase out synthetic pesticides in EU agriculture by 80% by 2030, starting with the most hazardous, to become 100% free of synthetic pesticides by 2035
2. Restore biodiversity: Restore natural ecosystems in agricultural areas so that farming becomes a vector of biodiversity recovery
3. Support farmers in the transition: Reform agriculture by prioritising small scale, diverse and sustainable farming, supporting a rapid increase in agroecological and organic practice, and enabling independent farmer-based training and research into pesticide- and GMO-free farming

Adrian Bebb, food and farming campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe, said *“This campaign stands shoulder-to-shoulder with farmers and farmworkers. We are demanding a just transition for farmers to support them through the switch to the pesticide-free, sustainable farming we need for our future.”*

Martin Dermine, environment policy officer at Pesticide Action Network Europe, said: *“Politicians have been investing in measures (such as financing the creation of insect "hotels" or the distribution of flower seeds) that risk being far more beneficial for their public image than for the pollinators they seemingly want to protect. As long as the root causes of bee populations' staggering die-off levels are not quickly and effectively tackled, it's hard to*

see how conditions for pollinators and biodiversity as a whole could improve. We urgently need a rapid transition towards pesticide-free, agroecological practices: CAP money should be spent to allow for such a transition”.

Veronika Feicht from the Munich Environmental Institute. said “*We are bringing the fight against synthetic pesticides to the European level by giving a united voice to people all over Europe who are demanding a new agricultural system. Citizens want a system that no longer damages biodiversity and ecosystems or puts consumer health at risk, but instead ensures the livelihood of bees and farmers alike and is healthier for people. With our initiative, we are committed to making this kind of agriculture a reality throughout Europe.*”

The campaign is run by a cross-sector alliance of civil society organisations covering the environment, health, farming and beekeeping. Amongst others, the organisers include the European networks Friends of the Earth Europe and the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) as well as the Munich Environmental Institute, the Aurelia foundation (Germany), Générations Futures (France) and GLOBAL 2000/Friends of the Earth Austria.

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[1] www.savebeesandfarmers.eu

[2] <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

Bees and other pollinators in particular are indispensable for preserving our ecosystems and biodiversity. Up to one third of our food production and two thirds of our daily fruits and vegetables rely on pollination through bees and other insects. Yet, they are existentially threatened by constant pesticide-contamination and habitat loss due to industrial agriculture.

[3] The rapid decline of both small farms and wildlife is deeply rooted in our current model of agricultural food production that heavily relies on big scale monocultural farming and the use of synthetic pesticides. To make things worse, the EU actively funds this form of agriculture through its current agropolitical agenda and its system of subsidies that favours mass production over small scale and eco friendly farming.

http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/nyeleni_eca_-_more_farmers_better_food_25.03.2019_0.pdf